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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: GOB RELEASES FOURTH POLITICAL PRISONER: YOUTH
ACTIVIST ARTUR FINKEVICH

REF: A. 07 MINSK 1049

- [1](#)B. MINSK 051
- [1](#)C. MINSK 024
- [1](#)D. STATE 10777

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The regime released political prisoner Artur Finkevich February 5, making him the fourth political prisoner freed since January 18. The move suggests the GOB will move forward with its plan to liberate all political prisoners, although the most difficult cases remain. End summary.

Artur Finkevich Sentence Commuted to Time Served

[1](#)2. (U) On February 5, the Mogilyov oblast court of appeals upheld the conviction of youth activist Artur Finkevich on charges of violating the terms of his previous sentence to hard labor (ref A). However, the court -- at the recommendation of the prosecution -- commuted the sentence from 18 months to time served, and announced that the decision would become effective the same day. Finkevich was released just two hours later, becoming the fourth internationally recognized political prisoner released by the GOB in less than three weeks.

Comment: Four Down, Two Plus to Go

[1](#)3. (C) From start to finish, Finkevich's hearing, attended by Pol/Econ Chief, took less than two hours. The speed at which the appeals court reached the decision to release Finkevich indicates clear instructions from Minsk. In finding a means to release Finkevich, the regime hopefully foreshadowed its modus operandi to release journalist Aleksandr Sdvizhkov (ref B), whose appeal should be heard this month. (Note: Finkevich had been visited by DCM in April 2007; we will seek a meeting with him this week. End note.)

Comment (cont.)

[1](#)4. (C) The GOB must also release the two long-term political prisoners, former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin and former MP Andrey Klimov, who previously attracted strong political support from beyond the ranks of idealistic youth. Fortunately, Finkevich's release also suggests that the

German Ambassador's ill-timed meeting with Lukashenko (ref D)
has not dissuaded the regime from following through with the
release of additional political prisoners.

STEWART